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ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 241644Z FEB 06
FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2179
INFO RUEHEE/ARAB LEAGUE COLLECTIVE
RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE
RHMFIUU/CDR USCENCOM MACDILL AFB FL
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC

UNCLAS BEIRUT 000570

SIPDIS

NSC FOR ABRAMS/DORAN/WERNER/SINGH
PARIS FOR ZEYA
LONDON FOR TSOU

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KISL](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [LE](#) [PTER](#)

SUBJECT: MGLE01: Thousands of Lebanese Shia take to the streets to peacefully protest attacks in Iraq

SUMMARY

¶1. (U) Hizballah organized a mass rally to protest the bombing of a Shia shrine in Iraq. More than 100,000 persons gathered in the Southern Suburbs on February 23. Hizballah SYG Nasrallah delivered a speech calling on Shia to remain calm and to avoid provocations between the Shia and the Sunni, which he said, benefit the US administration, Israel and the "Takfiriyyin" (provocateurs). Nasrallah said that the U.S. administration uses the tension in Iraq to justify its occupation of the country. Israel, Nasrallah claimed, also benefits because from Sunni-Shia tensions because violence would further destroy Iraq by igniting a Sunni-Shia war.

Nasrallah also warned against any retribution against Sunnis in Lebanon for attacks by Sunni against Shia in Iraq. He described attacks by individuals, seeking retribution, as treason against Islam. End Summary.

¶2. (U) The streets of south Beirut were filled on February 23 by more than one hundred thousand demonstrators answering the call of Hizballah to demonstrate solidarity with Shia Moslems murdered in sectarian violence in Iraq. The demonstrations were well-attended, even though called on about three hours' notice. Although the event was billed as an Iraq event, the opening speakers made clear their opposition to the United States, calling the U.S. the mother of terrorism. Organizers were careful not to fan the flames of growing confessional tensions in Lebanon; they repeatedly called for calm and peaceful response to the Iraq provocations, and most notably the explosion at the Samarra Mosque. However, Nasrallah was clearly speaking to his March 14 Coalition local political-adversaries when he warned all political parties against using the street to impose their will on all the Lebanese. "This is a very dangerous game and we shall not accept it, and the only way to solve our pressing problems is through consensus and dialogue," he added.

¶3. (SBU) Comment: This demonstration may give pause to those on the other side of the political fence (i.e., the March 14 Coalition) as it considers a major march on the Presidential palace in Baabda. Nasrallah has demonstrated that he could convene a demonstration of considerable size on a few hours' notice. This fact will weigh on Christians and Sunni as they think about whether to take their political grievances to the street. End comment.

